“All the World’s a Stage”: History of Elizabethan Theatre Bobby Muir

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“All the World’s a stage, and all the men and women merely players; they have their exits and their entrances; and one man in his time plays many parts.” This famous opening monologue phrase used by the character Jacques in William Shakespeare’s *As You like It* still has the power sway audiences today as it did the Elizabethan Era, a time where English Art, Culture, and Power exploded under the guide of an extremely powerful and influencing ruler, Queen Elizabeth I.

During her reign from 1558 to 1603, the kingdom of England had never experienced a golden age quite like before. The Motley crew that was the British Navy conquered the Spanish Armada, the most powerful navy in the world at the time. Many towns and cities like London exploded in population growth and wealth beyond imagination. But while over the years, people and ships, and stashes of money decay away, one last remaining remnant of the kingdom’s glory remains as fresh and as vibrant as ever since it began about five centuries ago: Elizabethan. This unlikely aspect of the Elizabethan Era; through movies and novels, has survived through times of famine, plagues, two world wars, and with the beginnings of the decline of paper publication, has survived and continues to outlive much of it’s more contemporary theater cousins today. But there many questions that remain. What is it? How did it form into its own self? And what are the impacts, if any’ does it have on the world today?

For starters, to understand the stage, one must first understand the time period it grew up in. Elizabethan Theatre is sometimes more properly referred to as “English Renaissance Theatre;” One reason for it is that it grew up in a time where all of Europe was casting off the horrors of the “Dark Ages” to enter into an “Age of Enlightenment.”During this time, new ideas questioned, if not shunned, old ideas that existed during the Dark Ages, and influenced new thinkers like Leonardo Da Vinci and inspired artists such as Michelangelo. Another reason for the stage to be known as “English Renaissance Theatre” was it grew up in its own special identity. Back in the 1500’s and 1600’s, England was tiny island in Northern Europe separated from the rest of the world; the only to make across to other lands was by ship. So in short,